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"To Exalt the Profession": Association, Ethics, and Editors in the Early Republic

Frank E. Fee Jr.
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"To Exalt the Profession": Association, Ethics, and Editors in the Early Republic

By Frank E. Fee Jr.

This research demonstrates that by the 1830s editors in America were coming together to talk about ethics and raising journalistic standards. Fearing that the excesses of partisanship had made their business "a vehicle of ribaldry and personal defamation," antebellum editors in nearly every state and territory met to try to tame their freewheeling craft. The convention movement soon led to formal associations of editors, a development that occurred significantly earlier than scholars generally have recognized.

A century before the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Canons of Ethics (1922)[1] and decades before the American Newspaper Publishers Association (1887),[2] editors and publishers sought to tame an often intemperate and at times dysfunctional business. As early as the 1820s, editors and publishers—often they were one and the same—convened "to exalt the profession,"[3] hoping to rationalize their craft's economics and behaviors in order to achieve the promise of "the art preservative of all arts"[4] and, of course, improve their finances. Their efforts set in motion conclaves that would lead to formal

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[1]"Statement of Principles," American Society of Newspapers website, http://asne.org/content.asp?pl=24&sl=171&contentid=171.

[2]Edwin Emery, *History of the American Newspaper Publishers Association* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1950; Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1970). Citations are to the Greenwood edition.

[3]S[hadrach] Penn Jr., "To the President of the Convention of Printers," *Lexington (KY) Intelligencer*, February 28, 1837.

[4]This boast, variously assigned to newspapers, bookbinding, and printing in general, was proclaimed frequently in the toasts and columns of antebellum printers. See, for instance, "The Baltimore Typographic Society," *Republican Watch-Tower*, New York, July 10, 1805; "Grand Canal Celebration," *North Star*, Danville, VT, November 22, 1825; "Celebration of the Late Revolution in France," *New-York Enquirer*, November 29, 1830, reprinted in *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, December 9, 1830; "The Value of the Press," *Floridian*, Tallahassee, FL, September 11, 1841; "Legal Prices—All Wrong," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, January 21, 1860.

Frank E. Fee Jr. is an associate professor emeritus of the University of North Carolina, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, ffee@email.unc.edu.

associations and, in time, generally agreed-upon norms for the role and conduct of journalism.

This research seeks to recover the history of those editors' and publishers' earliest attempts at professionalizing the craft. In doing so, it extends the work of scholars who have examined professional organizing and association in the post–Civil War years of the nineteenth century and provides new perspectives on the early craft.[5]

The research also highlights the fact that long after the putative end of the party press era, described variously as beginning in 1783 or 1800 and ending with the start of the Penny Press in 1833,[6] sharp-tongued partisanship continued to animate and influence journalism and its practitioners.[7] Even a casual perusal of antebellum newspapers underscores that if political parties no longer directly financed newspapers after the 1820s, politics and factionalism remained dominant in the mainstream press throughout the period covered in this research. The acidic DNA of a John Fenno, Philip Freneau,

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[5]See, in particular, Stephen A. Banning, "The Professionalization of Journalism: A Nineteenth-Century Beginning," *Journalism History* 24 (Winter 1998–1999): 157–163; Banning, "The Maine Press Association's Nineteenth Century Professional Identity," paper presented to the American Journalism Historians Association annual conference, October 10–13, 2012, Raleigh, NC. Banning offers a useful summary of the literature on media professionalism and its different "starting" points. Studying the minutes of the Missouri Press Association, he argues for moving up the start of professionalization into the nineteenth century because state newspaper associations were, as in Missouri, discussing "professional" issues such as ethics at least as early as 1867. Banning notes that the Maine Press Association's founding in 1864 moves up the timeline for professional activity. For analysis of professionalism in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Hazel Dicken-Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Betty Houchin Winfield, ed., *Journalism 1908: Birth of a Profession* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008). Michael Schudson states that while Walter Lippmann is credited with professionalizing journalism through legislation and through steadfast adherence to objectivity in covering the news, "The urge for professionalization in journalism did not begin with Lippmann" (152). He notes that "For several decades journalists had sought institutional means to make their occupation more respectable. Joseph Pulitzer, for instance, endowed the Columbia School of Journalism in 1904 (although it did not open its doors until 1913). Critics within the profession charged that a college of journalism would establish class distinctions in the newspaper world. Pulitzer answered that this was exactly what it should do—establish a distinction between the fit and the unfit." Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 152.

[6]See, for instance, Willard Grosvenor Bleyer, *Main Currents in the History of American Journalism* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1927), 100, 130; Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism. A History: 1690–1960*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 165, 167; William David Sloan, *The Media in America: A History*, 8th ed. (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2011), 69.

[7]For a useful summary of the persistence of partisanship long after the close of the partisan press era, see William E. Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833–1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999), 35–51.

William Duane, or Benjamin Franklin Bache still ran strong in the editorial genes well into the nineteenth century, and that was a point of concern that prompted many of the conventions of the period.

Finally, the research brings into sharp relief a little examined yet widely practiced phenomenon of early American journalism.[8] In 1820 a typographical society took shape in Charleston, South Carolina, and members met regularly through the antebellum period.[9] Between 1820 and the outbreak of the Civil War, editors in nearly every state and territory held at least one convention, some annually, some semiannually, or—in New Jersey, at least—quarterly.[10] Yet media historians seem not to have noted their existence, much less their importance. In many of these locales, the conventions birthed full-fledged editorial associations that undertook measures to standardize and constrain practices and behaviors. The editorial conventions of the 1820s and 1830s proved both incubators and testing grounds for ideas that would lead to formal associations of editors and publishers starting in the late 1840s and progressing through the nineteenth century.

These conventions force us to reappraise current thinking that situates ethics codes and press associations with the efforts of editors in the post–Civil War era.[11] More than a decade before the founding of the Associated Press by New York City newsmen in 1848 that some histories see as the first news association,[12] editors in Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and other states tried to forge ties and tame the rough-and-tumble craft through nascent codes of ethics.

This research recovers journalists' early efforts to establish guidelines that would help define their work in the new republic and that set the course for efforts to professionalize the industry in later years. Such an understanding is important because it recalculates the desire for uniform standards and underscores that the freewheeling antebellum journalism was not without its critics within the industry.

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[8]Mott, for instance, gives the associations two sentences, understates their prevalence, and never uncovers their importance. Mott, *American Journalism*, 314.

[9]"Typographical Society," *Southern Patriot*, Charleston, SC, January 10, 1843; "Letter from the South," *Sun*, Baltimore, December 14, 1853.

[10]"Editorial Convention in New Jersey," *New York Herald*, August 15, 1858.

[11]See Banning, "The Professionalization of Journalism: A Nineteenth-Century Beginning."

[12]The tradition of seeing the Associated Press in New York in the late 1840s as the beginning of organizations among journalists is well rooted in media history. See, for instance, Bleyer, *Main Currents*, 145, 402; Sidney Kobre, *Development of American Journalism* (Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown, 1969), 272–275. The nineteenth-century editor turned historian Hudson distinguished between the corporate combinations such as the Associated Press and what he called social organizations, press clubs, and associations, saying that the AP "deals in facts, and not in fricassee." Hudson, *Journalism in the United States*, 666.

Method

The research rests in large part on the expanded reach of searchable, digital nineteenth-century US newspaper and periodical databases that grow and proliferate almost daily. Mentions of antebellum-era editorial gatherings were found, sometimes by chance, in microfilm and paper copies in archives at the North Carolina Collection of Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the American Antiquarian Society, and Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of the Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester. This paper trail provided key words by which to search for mentions of editorial gatherings, conventions, and festivals in digital databases. The technique provides insights into how editors of the day used terms whose meanings may have changed over time and also affords measures of frequency, possible regional diversity, and studies of issue salience over time.[13]

As items in the news columns of this period often ran without headlines, for bibliographic ease pseudo-headlines have been created where necessary using the first few words of the item for a headline, e.g., "The New-Hampshire Editors' Convention." Most often, when headlines did appear on these items, they read, simply, "Editorial Convention." Except where noted, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are rendered as they were in the originals.

Background

The earliest decades of the American experiment were fraught with huge questions about governance and socioeconomic relationships in the growing nation. Editors of the time were observers, recorders, and participants in the debates, and their journals both reflected and contributed to the discussions and the tensions such questions brought.[14] As historian Alan Taylor points out, the privileged classes in America feared "that the revolutionary upheaval compounded by frontier expansion would prove permanent."[15] It was a country "engaged in the continuing conquest and dispossession of the

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[13]The examination included uses of the word "profession" and its variants, and such terms as "party newspapers," "political editors," "party editors," and "practical printers." Key-word searches for "editors' convention," "editorial convention," and "printers' festival" were used in the databases of Accessible Archives, the Library of Congress' Chronicling America Historic American Newspapers, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Readex's America's Historical Newspapers, and the Old New York State Historical Newspaper Pages of the Old Fulton New York Post-cards website at http://fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html.

[14]See, for instance, Carol Sue Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783–1833* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996).

[15]Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 419.

native peoples, riven with competition to control and own the lands wrested from the Indians, and bitterly divided between Federalists and Republicans contesting for power and competing to control the meaning of the American Revolution."[16]

The printers of the early republic perceived what historian Jeffrey L. Pasley calls "the steady decline in the reputation and social position of their trade after the Revolution."[17] Moreover, the printers of the old artisan system were being succeeded by "younger men . . . [who] lacked or lost the trade-oriented attitude and life goals of the colonial and Revolutionary printers."[18] The trade was evolving and differentiation of labor that was going on in the printing offices meant that in the early days of the period, publisher, editor, and master printer, particularly in the smaller establishments, were one and the same person. By midcentury, except on the frontier, printers were production workers, and editors, many of whom had never set type, were in charge of management and content. The emergence of what were called "professional editors"—men who had not come up through the apprentice-journeyman system of the self-styled "practical printers"—created new tensions as they often "came to find their trade's chief attraction in politics."[19]

With partisanship came rancor: freedom of the press offered ample opportunity for bitter attacks on individuals as well as principles associated with the various political factions. Whether actually underwritten by political parties or simply allied with one faction or another, newspapers often became vehicles for venom that could lead to public physical confrontations among editors.[20] One of the most scabrous editorial wits, the *New-York Herald*'s James Gordon Bennett, who, for example, referred to his *New-York Tribune* rival Horace Greeley as "Grubby Greeley,"[21] described the second

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[16]Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 419.

[17]Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 45.

[18]Ibid., 46.

[19]Ibid., 47. See also Gerald J. Baldasty, "The Press and Politics in the Age of Jackson," *Journalism Monographs* 89 (August 1984).

[20]See, for instance, Fletcher M. Green, "Duff Green, Militant Journalist of the Old School," *American Historical Review* 52, no. 2 (January 1947): 247–264; Frederick Hudson, *Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873); William E. Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833–1865*; Mott, *American Journalism*; Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers"*; Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1945); Rollo G. Silver, "Violent Assaults on American Printing Shops, 1788–1860," *Printing History* 1, no. 2 (1979): 10–18; Henry Watterson, "The Personal Equation in Journalism," in *The Profession of Journalism*, ed. Willard Grosvenor Bleyer (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1918), 97–111.

[21]James Gordon Bennett, "The Worcester Fanatics," *New-York Herald*, October 29, 1850, in David A. Copeland, *The Antebellum Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1820 to 1860* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003), 306.

women's rights convention as a "motley gathering of fanatical mongrels, of old grannies, male and female, of fugitive slaves and fugitive lunatics."[22] "An editor whose allegiance lay with the other party," historian Mitchell Stephens writes, "might be labeled in print an 'impious, disorganizing wretch,' 'a scoundrel and a liar,' 'the equal of the most atrocious felon ever executed at Tyburn,' or, in [Benjamin Franklin] Bache's case, 'an atrocious wretch . . . abandoned liar . . . (and) an ill-looking devil.'"[23] Historian William Huntzicker notes that "Rival editors called each other names like detestable caitiff, beggar, and rapist. [New York publisher and politician Thurlow] Weed characterized an opponent as 'Martin Van Buren's pimp.' Bennett described the *New York Sun* 'a sneaking, driveling nigger paper' managed by 'the garbage of society.'"[24]

Out of fear that these journalistic brawls were damaging the press's public esteem, groups of editors met fairly often to urge reforms in the profession. The antebellum years were a time of association in America, and the conventions of editors and publishers were part of a general American tendency toward association noted by, among others, the visiting Alexis de Tocqueville.[25] An 1854 convention of Ohio editors typified the concerns in resolving "that we earnestly reprobate [*sic*] the practice, (all too common amongst political editors,) as derogatory to the dignity and well being of the Press, of personal vituperation and abuse, instead of the candid and dispassionate discussion of principles and measures, or an examination of official conduct and qualifications."[26] In 1838, Thomas Ritchie, editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, opened a convention of Virginia editors by declaring the public's low regard "is our own fault. . . . We have descended to abuse each other in a manner that has lost the respect of the world. . . . How can we expect to be treated as gentlemen, if we do not conduct ourselves as gentlemen?"[27]

The resolutions might be distributed by the conventions' arrangements committees to area and regional newspapers, and the exchange press guaranteed that large numbers of readers would know what the publishers were

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[22]James Gordon Bennett, "Woman's Rights Convention," *New-York Herald*, October 28, 1850, in Copeland, *Antebellum Era*, 305.

[23]Mitchell Stephens, *A History of News* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 183.

[24]Huntzicker, *Popular Press, 1833–1865*, 44.

[25]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, J. P. Mayer, ed. (New York: Perennial Classics, 2000).

[26]"Editorial Resolves," *Perrysburg (OH) Journal*, January 23, 1854. Punctuation in the original.

[27]"Virginia Editorial Convention," *Newport (RI) Mercury*, February 17, 1838. Ironically, less than a decade later, the editor of the Richmond, VA, *Whig*, John Hampden Pleasants, "one of the ablest editors in the South," was fatally wounded in a duel by Ritchie's son, Thomas Ritchie Jr. See J. Cutler Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985).

thinking. The conventions' deliberations gave editors, individually and collectively, a platform on which to build their case for the importance of the press. "How can a free government be wisely administered without it?" Ritchie asked the Virginia editors' 1841 convention, knowing that his remarks would be published for a wide audience. "How can a free people acquire that knowledge of facts and of characters which is so necessary to the proper selection of their agents?"[28]

Central to the conduct of the press, in their eyes, was the editor. "Not only should an editor be a man of learning, of refined tastes, of high, generous and noble impulses," declared the *Alta California* in 1851, "but he must also possess a penetrating intellect, and a knowledge of men; whilst at the same time must have so liberal a share of that commodity called 'common sense' as will enable him to apply his other accomplishments and acquirements to the practical production of good."[29] Unlike the infrequent communication of presidents and legislators with their publics, *Godey's Lady's Book* argued, "the editor of the newspaper is in daily, weekly, or at least monthly communion with *his* constituents, and that too on terms of perfect equality, candor, and friendship, and therefore, how perfectly free, independent, just, able, and well informed should not the editor be?"[30]

Against visions of such exalted importance, editors could easily consider themselves undervalued and underpaid. Declared the *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, "No class of men are rewarded for their labors with more kicks and fewer coppers, than printers."[31] A Kentucky editor claimed, "Master printers receive less for their toils and their risks in business than any other class in America."[32] To a New York editor, "Valuable as are the labors of the conductors of the public press, as a class of society—and constant as is the demand for what they produce, there is no occupation which, as a general rule, is so poorly paid."[33]

These printers saw their incomes and their prestige in the community as intimately related. Beyond self-preservation, however, the early editors argued that their success was indivisibly entwined with the success of the American experiment. As one editor put it in 1837, "Elevate the character of the press, and you at once use the most powerful engine to advance and dignify the moral constitution of society. . . . Show us a licentious press, and

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[28]"The Value of the Press," *Floridian*, Tallahassee, FL, September 11, 1841.

[29]"The Editors' Convention," *Alta California*, San Francisco, August 15, 1851.

[30]"Godey's Arm-Chair: State Editorial Convention," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, July 1858. Italics in original.

[31]"Printer's Convention," *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, February 19, 1836.

[32]S[hadrach] Penn Jr., "To the President of the Convention of Printers." See also, for instance, "Editorial Conventions," *New-Hampshire Patriot*, Concord, NH, April 11, 1836.

[33]"An Editorial Convention," *New-York Traveller, Spirit of the Times and Family Journal*, New York, September 28, 1833.

We will show you a corrupt people."[34] A year later, Richie of the *Richmond Enquirer* told his state's editors, "The licentiousness of the press insensibly lowers the tone of private manners, and infects the character of our public councils. In this respect therefore, the interests of society, as well as the reputation of its conductors, demand a thorough reform."[35]

Eyeing the Established Professions

Improving their standing in the community would justify, in their eyes, improving their economic circumstances through uniform rates that would take them higher on the socioeconomic ladder. From the beginning, many editors focused on the link between higher occupational status and financial security and had their eyes on the public esteem of the established, so-called learned professions: law, medicine, and the ministry. When the editor of the Geneva (NY) *Palladium* urged a printers' convention in 1825, it was "for the purpose of taking measures to place themselves on a footing with other professions and to receive an equivalent for their labors."[36] Likewise, in calling for cash in advance for subscriptions and advertising as an agenda item for an Ohio convention, the *Ohio State Journal* declared,

> How many young tyros, in the editorial profession, have had their young and glorious aspirations crushed by the remissness of their pretended patrons! The lawyer takes his retaining fee. The doctor will scarcely deign to visit the bed of death without first coldly calculating the chances of ultimate remuneration. . . . But the printer, especially in the West, is obliged to wait the tardy justice of his customers.[37]

Claiming that "the whole [editorial] profession should not be condemned for a few black sheep," a New York editor likewise drew comparisons with the traditional professions, arguing "There are hypocrites among the clergy, knaves among attorneys, and quacks among the professors of the healing art."[38]

Contributing to their low estate, the editors believed, were behaviors that diminished the public stature of their craft. These behaviors, they worried, might prevent them from achieving the prestige enjoyed by lawyers, doctors, and the clergy. "A convention of the editors in any given state would be of

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[34]*Wilmington (NC) Advertiser*, "The Hillsborough Recorder," exchange-press reprint in the *Hillsborough (NC) Recorder*, June 23, 1837. Capitalization in original.

[35]"Virginia Editorial Convention," *Newport (RI) Mercury*, February 17, 1838.

[36]"Printers' Convention," *Haverhill (MA) Gazette*, April 16, 1825.

[37]"Printers' Convention," *Ohio State Journal*, Columbus, June 12, 1839.

[38]"An Editorial Convention," *New-York Traveller, Spirit of the Times and Family Journal*, September 28, 1833.

still more service to the profession," said the *Newburyport (MA) Herald* in 1833. "In this respect, Editors should be as wise as the members of other professions—as the lawyers, physicians, clergymen, &c. . . . And let us repeat, the bar is the model, by which editors should form their associations. The lawyers are almost universally respectable, because they respect each other."[39]

State of the Professions

Although the proprietors of the press referenced the learned professions as models to emulate, the notion of a profession in the modern sense was just gaining traction in all fields. Mostly in the news columns, "profession" was a synonym for "occupation." A sampling of occupations mentioned as professions in the newspapers studied for this research included doctors and lawyers, but also teachers,[40] a newspaper publisher,[41] military officers,[42] shoemakers,[43] a tailor,[44] a blacksmith,[45] and a steamboat captain.[46]

Even the learned professions struggled to find footing in the first half of the nineteenth century as professionalization, "an attempt to translate one order of scarce resources—special knowledge and skills—into another—social and economic rewards,"[47] at times collided with the popular values in the nascent American experiment with democracy. It was only from the Civil War onward that lawyers saw "the steady movement toward the professionalization of legal education and law practice."[48] On the Wisconsin Supreme Court between 1836 and 1853, for instance, "There was a notable absence of any law school training among the justices. . . . Reading the law,

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[39]"Editorial Conventions," *Newburyport (MA) Herald*, December 13, 1833.

[40]"Report of the Committee," *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, March 25, 1836.

[41]"The State Paper," *State Journal*, Montpelier, VT, May 3, 1836; *New York Mirror*, "Practical Printers," exchange-press item in the *Rutland (VT) Herald*, May 10, 1836.

[42]"Character of Gen. Harrison," *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, April 1, 1836; "War as Affecting the Duration of Human Life," *Sunbury (PA) American and Shamokin Journal*, December 5, 1846.

[43]"Report of the Committee," *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, March 25, 1836; "'Rising in the World,'" *Vermont Press* exchange item in the *Joliet, IL Signal*, December 7, 1847.

[44]"'Rising in the World,'" *Vermont Press* exchange item in the *Joliet, IL Signal*, December 7, 1847.

[45]"'Rising in the World,'" *Vermont Press* exchange item in the *Joliet, IL Signal*, December 7, 1847.

[46]"The Poor Boy," *New York Messenger*, reprinted in the *Burlington (VT) Free Press*, January 8, 1836.

[47]Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), xvii.

[48]Kermit Hall, *The Magic Mirror: Law in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

which involved study in an established lawyer's office, was the predominant form of legal education in mid-nineteenth-century America."[49] Moreover, there was strong egalitarian animosity to elites in Jacksonian America.[50] The Massachusetts legislature in 1835 "completely overturned the power of the lawyers and their bar associations to control the admissions to the practice of law through the courts," establishing automatic admission to practice for "any candidate who had studied law in the office of any attorney of the state for three years."[51]

Doctors likewise "had much less influence, income, and prestige" in much of the century, and "'In all of our American colleges,' a professional journal commented bitterly in 1869, 'medicine has ever been and is now, the most despised of all the professions which liberally-educated men are expected to enter.'"[52] And while the University of Pennsylvania boasted the first medical school in America in 1765, "the average practicing physician until well along in the last century received his training by acting as an apprentice to some noted practitioner."[53] In practice, too, "Many Americans who already had a rationalist, activist orientation to disease refused to accept physicians as authoritative."[54]

Although lawyers of the period likened their profession to the ministry,[55] the diverse religious denominations and practices offered little that could be called a professional class. The earliest colleges in the colonies had been dedicated to producing clergy, but by the time of the American Revolution their curricula had become secularized.[56] This, combined with the "Jacksonian attack upon traditional elites and their standards"[57] and denominations such as the Methodists, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ "holding that no amount of education could make up for the lack of a divine call"[58] meant that

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[49]Howard Feigenbaum, "The Lawyer in Wisconsin, 1836–1860: A Profile," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 55, no. 2 (Winter, 1971–1972): 100–106, quote at 102.

[50]See, for instance, Larson, *Rise of Professionalism*.

[51]Gerard W. Gawalt, "Sources of Anti-Lawyer Sentiment in Massachusetts, 1740–1840," *American Journal of Legal History* 14, no. 4 (October 1970): 283–307, quote at 306.

[52]Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 7.

[53]William Warren Sweet, "The Rise of Theological Schools in America," *Church History* 6, no. 3 (September 1937): 260–273.

[54]Starr, *Social Transformation*, 17. Laural Thatcher Ulrich documents the competition between trained doctors and folk healers on the Maine frontier in *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

[55]Philip Gaines, "The 'True Lawyer' in America: Discursive Construction of the Legal Profession in the Nineteenth Century," *American Journal of Legal History* 45, no. 2 (April 2001): 132–153.

[56]Sweet, "Rise of Theological Schools."

[57]Larson, *Rise of Professionalism*, 120.

[58]Sweet, "Rise of Theological Schools," 270.

professionalization of the clergy did not get underway until the development of theological schools in the 1840s.[59]

Conventions and Codes of Ethics

The speeches and resolutions adopted at the early editorial conventions show tension between self-interest and social responsibility, and, for the most part, social responsibility seems to have been seen as a means to self-interest. Nevertheless, the rhetoric relentlessly invoked the public good, seeing public regard for journalism as enabling journalism to serve the American body politic as well as itself. Other regular agenda items included adopting uniform rates for advertising and job printing,[60] promoting free or reduced-rate postage for newspapers,[61] requiring cash in advance for advertising and subscriptions,[62] requiring laws and other government notices to be published as advertising,[63] and unifying hiring practices.[64]

Promoting Ethics

An important feature of the convention resolves of the 1830s and later was language that created a rudimentary code of ethics for the profession. Often taking pride of place at the top of the published resolutions were statements affirming the need for courtesy and decorum among editors. In March 1837, Kentucky editors agreed that

> In all future discussions, whether political or otherwise, the Editors of the Kentucky press shall carefully abstain from all disrespectful personal allusions or epithets towards each other; and shall conduct all controversies between themselves with decency, decorum and moderation; and, that it be also recommended to them to cultivate

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[59]Sweet, "Rise of Theological Schools." See also Larson, *Rise of Professionalism*, 122.

[60]See, for instance, "Convention of Editors," *North Carolina Standard*, Raleigh, November 8, 1837; "Convention of Editors," *Nacogdoches (TX) Chronicle*, April 19, 1853; "Editors' and Publishers' Convention," *Daily Atlas*, Boston, January 23, 1854; "Rules and Rates of Advertising," *Barre (MA) Gazette*, May 26, 1854; "Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, July 18, 1857.

[61]See, for instance, "State Convention of Editors," *Hudson River Chronicle*, Sing-Sing, NY, June 26, 1849; "Convention of Editors," *Farmer's Cabinet*, Amherst, NH, August 9, 1849; "Maine Editorial Convention," *Sun*, Baltimore, February 11, 1852.

[62]See, for instance, "Printers' Convention," *Ohio State Journal*, Columbus, June 12, 1839; "Ohio Newspapers on the Cash Plan," *Democrat and Sentinel*, Ebensburg, PA, February 1, 1855; "Maryland Editorial Convention," *Sun*, Baltimore, February 24, 1860.

[63]"Editorial Convention," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, December 20, 1849.

[64]See, for instance, "Editors' Convention," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, December 4, 1837.

each other's good will, and on all proper occasions to advance each other's interests.[65]

When editors of thirteen of North Carolina's twenty-five newspapers gathered in Raleigh on November 1, 1837, they agreed that the press "in too many instances . . . [had become] a vehicle of ribaldry and personal defamation."[66] They resolved that while their "whole energies shall be brought to bear upon public wrongs, the greatest care should be exercised, that, in no case, shall it violate the sanctity of private life. To this end, Editors should carefully abstain in their discussions, from all personalities and indecorous language."[67]

In a move that might not reduce the vitriol but would benefit the printers nonetheless by putting a price on it, the North Carolina editors further resolved at the 1837 convention:

> That no statement or communication in relation to personal disputes or private controversies shall be admitted into the columns of the public Journals of this state, or *otherwise than as an Advertisement, and that double the ordinary rates will be charged for any such Advertisement.*—And further, that in no instance, will we insert an advertisement of a husband against his wife.[68]

Indiana editors in 1846 resolved "to abstain from the use of language personally offensive and disreputable, to each other; and that as differ they must, both as to men and measures, they should differ as men and gentlemen."[69] Later that year, the *Wisconsin Democrat* urged editors from its territory's twenty-two newspapers to convene "to establish among them a system of conduct and intercourse which will have a tendency to soften the asperities of party strife and maintain the dignity of the press in some measure commensurate with its public importance."[70]

Argued the *Democrat*:

> Nothing is so mean and cowardly as for an editor to take advantage of his facilities for scattering broad-cast through the country vituperation and abuse of private individuals with which the public have nothing to do, and merely to gratify the malice of some individual who has not the courage to meet his foe like a brave and an honest man.—Giving currency to rumors of doubtful truth and even falsehoods in times of high party excitement under the mistaken

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[65]"Editors' Convention," *North Carolina Standard*, Raleigh, March 29, 1837.

[66]"Convention of Editors," *North Carolina Standard*, Raleigh, November 8, 1837.

[67]Ibid.

[68]Ibid. Emphasis added. In a sense, these editors had found a way to monetize invective.

[69]"Editorial Reformation," *Wisconsin Democrat*, Madison, March 14, 1846.

[70]"Convention of Editors," *Wisconsin Democrat*, Madison, September 26, 1846.

plea that the "end justifies the means," is well calculated to destroy confidence in the statements and impair the usefulness of the newspaper press. Uncourteous and offensive language toward each other will surely breed contempt in the mind of the reader, and degrade the high functions of our class.[71]

Illinois editors convening in Chicago in 1854 similarly attempted to negotiate proper behavior among their colleagues. As one newspaper reported:

The ethics of the profession, and the minor morals or manners, which should govern the conduct and social intercourse of its members, were discussed with truth and eloquence. Mr. Saxe suggested as an invariable rule, that editors should, in their discussions, refrain from the use of each other's names, and refer only to their Journals. The duty of courtesy, fairness, candor and mutual respect, in order to secure the elevation of the profession, advance its influence on society and preserve its true dignity, was eloquently advocated by the speakers.[72]

In Virginia, the attempt to tame the news columns went further. Besides calling for goodwill among editors, the 1838 convention attempted to curb sensationalism overall, resolving:

That, in the opinion of this convention, it would greatly tend to correct the public taste, to advance the cause of virtue and sound morality, if the editors of newspapers would discountenance, as much as possible, the details of murders and suicides, the disgusting incidents connected with duels and affrays, which sometimes occur in different parts of our country, and also, accounts of the ingenuity of the vicious in their depradations [*sic*] upon society; all of which only tend to encourage vice, and spread the knowledge of crime.[73]

Newspapers, the delegates stated, should be "devoted as much as possible, to the dissemination of useful facts, of general knowledge, and of all such matter as will tend to refine, to enlighten and to improve, in preference to articles which merely gratify a vitiated taste, or pamper a depraved appetite for scandal."[74]

In 1833, the premier abolitionist editor William Lloyd Garrison used talk of editorial conventions to strike against what he saw as a "downright

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[71]Ibid.

[72]"Festival to the Editors in Chicago," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 1, 1854. J. G. Saxe, editor of the *Burlington (VT) Sentinel*, in Chicago to give a series of lectures to the city's Literary Association, was invited to speak at the editors' meeting.

[73]"Proceedings of the Editorial Convention," *Farmers' Register*, Petersburg, VA, February 1, 1838; "Editorial Convention," *Western Christian Advocate*, Cincinnati, OH, March 9, 1838.

[74]"Editorial Convention," *Western Christian Advocate*, Cincinnati, OH, March 9, 1838.

shame on many, otherwise respectable journals, that they are continually aiding the traffickers in wickedness, to spread their abominations over our land."[75] Rather, he claimed, convention organizers should "pass a resolution disapproving and discouraging all editors in the United States from inserting in their respective Newspapers any advertisements which in any manner countenance or encourage war, slavery, intemperance, horseracing, lotteries, and every other species of gambling."[76]

Various conventions from time to time took up other ethical issues. Wisconsin editors in 1857 agreed, "That the fraternity be recommended to discontinue and discountenance the practice of gratuitous puffing in general, and particularly to exclude from their columns all puffs of quack and patent Medicines."[77] In Maryland in 1860, editors voted "recommending . . . the discontinuance of gratuitous notices for the benefit of advertisers."[78] The effectiveness of these attempts to unify business practices is difficult to gauge. Historian Gerald Baldasty notes that well into the century advertisers could count on editorial "puffs" to promote their products.[79] The fact that often the same resolutions were being adopted year after year is evidence that the resolutions were not always effective. Still, if not in associations, editors could work cooperatively on economic issues. Historian Charles G. Steffen notes that when Philadelphia proprietors agreed in 1809 to charge regular advertising rates for marriage notices, Hezikiah Niles of *Niles Weekly Register* in Baltimore

> advised his Baltimore colleagues to do likewise. It took some time for the idea to catch on, but five years later the Baltimore *American*, Baltimore *Federal Gazette*, Baltimore *Patriot*, and Baltimore *Whig* notified their readers that henceforth they would expect payment for notices of marriages as well as meetings of fire companies and militia units.[80]

But an 1815 attempt to standardize the advertising rates of New York City's largest dailies failed when "the Republican editors of the New York *Courier*

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[75]William Lloyd Garrison, "Editorial Convention," *Liberator*, Boston, November 30, 1833.

[76]Ibid. In the same issue of the *Liberator*, Garrison published a lengthy denunciation of the newspaper press's general failure to fight vice in their communities and offer "a *consistent* advocacy . . . by the conductors of the press to the moral improvements of the times." Garrison, "Editors and Newspapers—No. 1," *Liberator*, November 30, 1833.

[77]"Editorial Convention. Held in Pettibone's Hall, Portage City, July 9th and 10th, 1857," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, July 18, 1857.

[78]"Maryland Editorial Convention," *Sun*, Baltimore, February 24, 1860.

[79]Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

[80]Charles G. Steffen, "Newspapers for Free: The Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (Fall 2003): 381–419, quote at 405.

and *National Advocate* refused to fall in line," seen as a betrayal of the craft and an "attempt to undersell the market."[81]

Free Press and Free Ride?

One ethical issue on which the editors stumbled from time to time was whether a free press deserved a free pass. Host cities as well as some along the route to the conventions often could be depended on to fete the travelers in hopes of favorable press reports. "The people of Decatur, we see, are making arrangements to do the hospitable in a manner that is befitting the abundant country in which they live," declared the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1856, "so *between* the liberality of the [rail] road and the hospitality of Decatur, we think, aside from the mere political expectations, a 'good time generally' may be anticipated."[82] This was not always the case, however. "The La Crosse *Union* suggests that all who attend the Green Bay meeting of the [Wisconsin Editors' and Publishers'] Association, should go prepared to, and 'pay their own bills,'" noted the *Wisconsin Patriot* in 1860. "The suggestion is right, and we hope it will be observed. The people of Green Bay will, no doubt, extend to the fraternity every courtesy due to the occasion, but they should not be burdened with the expenses of so large a body as we hope to see present."[83]

Free or reduced-fare transportation was another matter. Along with the importance of America's burgeoning railroad system to the distribution of printed material was its importance in transporting editors and publishers to their conventions. No doubt recognizing the value of an indebted press, the railroads frequently provided free or reduced-price tickets to editors and publishers traveling to conventions and other press celebrations.[84] For an 1860 convention of "all the editors of the South and West over the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad," special rates were extended to editors by "all the railroad and steamboat lines between Chicago and Mount Vernon [VA]."[85] Illinois editors attending a Free State editors convention in 1856 were told that "The Illinois Central, upon the line of which the Convention will be held, has liberal officers, who will, we have no doubt, be glad to extend to all Editors,

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[81]Steffen, "Newspapers for Free," 405.

[82]"State Editorial Convention," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 14, 1856.

[83]"Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, May 12, 1860.

[84]See, for instance, "Printers' Festival—Cleveland and Columbus Railroads," *Daily Ohio Statesman*, Columbus, January 16, 1851; "Editorial Convention," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, January 26, 1854; "Printers' Festival at Portsmouth," *Daily Atlas*, Boston, October 4, 1856. Printers' festivals were dinners distinct from the conventions, although occasionally they coincided with them. Corporate travel subsidies often could be had for either. See Frank E. Fee Jr., "Breaking Bread, Not Bones: Printers' Festivals and Professionalism in Antebellum America," *American Journalism* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 308–335.

[85]"That Editorial Excursion," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, April 21, 1860.

who wish to travel over their road, the courtesies in which they are usually so liberal."[86]

When the railroads were not forthcoming, the editors struck back. Stung when the railroads, which had enjoyed favorable press and, in turn, offered "courtesies" to the press, discontinued the discounts, Ohio editors in 1855 resolved "That we . . . from this time forth will imitate the example set us by the Railroad corporations, and do that which it is *our* business interest to do—make with them our courtesies '*a fair business transaction*,' and recommend this course for the adoption of our brethren throughout Ohio."[87] A similar contretemps occurred in Wisconsin, where the newspapers had an on-again, off-again relationship with the rails. An 1857 resolution declared that "We approve of the system adopted by the Railroad Companies of cutting off 'Dead Heads [i.e., non-paying passengers],' but . . . we protest against the term being applied to our Brethren of the local Press."[88] The convention decried "a short-sighted policy on the part of the companies, in a young State like ours, of cutting off those whose business it is to *make known* the wants and resources of a country whose growth and development to a great extent, govern the success and prosperity of Railroads themselves."[89] Free passes were available once again the following year, when the Wisconsin editors' convention coincided with the State Fair and took place on the fairgrounds.[90] But in 1860, the railroads restricted their passes to "those living on their immediate lines, or in counties through which their roads pass."[91] Yelped the *Wisconsin Patriot*, "We regard the refusal to grant passes as anything but liberal on the part of the R.R. Companies, but if they can stand it, we think the Editors can."[92] Like many editors, the *Patriot*'s proprietors saw a quid pro quo in their dealings with the railroads. "They are continually receiving favors and advantages from the press, which such occasions only afford an opportunity for making proper return. They should . . . willingly grant such passes as are asked for by the Corresponding Secretary."[93]

Enforcement Difficulties

Enforcement of the codes drawn up at the conventions would be problematic. The *Macon Weekly Telegraph* saw value in some of the North Carolina editors' 1837 resolves but, recalling an earlier Georgia editors' convention,

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[86]"State Editorial Convention," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 14, 1856.

[87]"Convention," *New-York Times*, January 23, 1855.

[88]"Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, July 18, 1857.

[89]Ibid. Italics in original.

[90]"The Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, September 18, 1858.

[91]"The Following Note," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, June 9, 1860.

[92]Ibid.

[93]"Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, May 12, 1860.

declared that "To be of much benefit, the Convention should be annual—no intercourse, communication or exchange be held with any one [*sic*] who did not enter into the agreement—and every new editor required to sign it before his press or prospectus would be noticed."[94]

In 1838, the Virginia editors' resolutions committee recognized the difficulty inherent in a free, pluralistic press:

> It is . . . in the hands of responsible and independent individuals, whose opinions and judgment are as various, as their establishments are separate and distinct. It is obvious, then, that much must be left to the sound discretion of the editors themselves. We can do nothing more than to recognize certain general principles which ought to regulate the press.[95]

The editors did have one weapon against recalcitrant members. Often the resolves included a non-intercourse clause threatening to cut off exchange-press circulation to offending newspapers. Kentucky editors in 1837 agreed, "That if any Editor or Publisher shall forfeit his pledge, *after agreeing to the Resolutions adopted by this Convention*, all professional intercourse with him be immediately discontinued."[96] To "strike off the offending paper from the exchange list of all the others, thus cutting off his supplies," would, as a New York editor put it in 1833, be "starving him into good behavior."[97]

Dissenting Views

In spite of their lofty aims, editorial conventions were not hailed by all in the business. Declared the *Daily Picayune* in 1837, "The Conventions of Editors, we think, ought to be classed among the humbugs of the day. Bennett says, 'the vote of a Convention cannot make an ass a Shakespeare.'"[98] Noting the North Carolina convention that year, the *Baltimore Transcript* sniffed, "It is a source of sincere regret that the conductors of the political press in

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94"Editors' Convention," *Macon (GA) Weekly Telegraph*, December 4, 1837.

95"Proceedings of the Editorial Convention," *Farmers' Register*, Petersburg, VA, February 1, 1838.

96"Editors' Convention," *Lexington (KY) Intelligencer*, February 28, 1837.

97"An Editorial Convention," *New-York Traveller, Spirit of the Times and Family Journal*, New York, September 28, 1833.

98"The Conventions of Editors," *Daily Picayune*, New Orleans, December 23, 1837. Although not further identified, the item may have been quoting *New-York Herald* editor James Gordon Bennett, well known for goading fellow journalists, often at his peril. The same day that the *Geneva (NY) Gazette* reported on a New York editors' and printers' convention, another item in the paper reported Bennett's caning in a New York street by *New-York Courier & Enquirer* editor James Watson Webb. "The Assembling of the Proposed Editors and Printers' Convention" and "A Fracas Took Place," *Geneva (NY) Gazette*, January 27, 1836. See also Susan Thompson, *The Penny Press: The Origins of the Modern News Media, 1833–1861* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2004).

this country are such a venal crew, as to require formal pledges of each other to keep within the bounds of decency. . . . Alas, for the country, when it has come to pass that the 'guardians of its morals' are compelled to resort to these expedients to protect themselves against each other."[99]

"We 'went in,' once, for an Editorial Convention, and would again, if we thought would do any good," offered one Wisconsin editor, "but you might as well attempt to fix limits to the comet, as to fix printers prices, and have them all stick to them."[100] He added,

> We'd like the fun of getting together with the editors of the State, and having a good time generally—for they all know how to do the agreeable—but as for the idea that we can all mutually agree not to cut each other's throats, by underbidding—and not break over the rules the very first opportunity, we don't entertain it.[101]

If not outright opposed to the conventions, other editors remained skeptics. "The Editors' Convention held in this State a year or two ago, did some good," said the *Georgia Telegraph* in 1837, "but the numerous changes since, have nearly abrogated its benefits."[102] The *Geneva (NY) Gazette* opined in 1836, "We have heretofore expressed our doubts whether much good can be effected by a convention of this description; but as our brethren of the types appear to be nearly unanimous in favor of the measure, we hope it may 'go ahead.' "[103]

Failed Conventions

Although convivial outings for the most part, reports on the conventions suggest the skeptics had a point in dismissing their effectiveness. Attendance could be disappointing. "They tried to have a Louisiana Editorial Convention at Baton Rouge on the 17th ult. but the Editors came up missing," the *New-York Tribune* reported in 1843.[104] A Pennsylvania convention in 1858 drew only twenty-six editors and "did not accomplish anything definite, for the simple reason that it was difficult to adopt any plan calculated to bring about

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[99]*Baltimore Transcript*, "Editorial Convention," exchange-press item in the *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette*, Burlington, Wisconsin Territory, August 24, 1837.

[100]"Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, June 13, 1857.

[101]Ibid.

[102]"Editors' Convention," *Georgia Telegraph,* Macon, GA, December 4, 1837.

[103]"The Assembling of the Proposed Editors and Printers' Convention," *Geneva (NY) Gazette*, January 27, 1836.

[104]"They Tried," *New-York Tribune*, August 5, 1843. Nonattendance was not always a sign of disapproval, however. Although unable to be at the Raleigh, NC, convention, proprietors of the *Charlotte Journal* assured, "The whole proceedings meet with our entire approbation." "See the Proceedings of the Editorial Convention," *Charlotte (NC) Journal*, November 17, 1837.

the reforms necessary to place the country press on the position it should sustain."[105] The account of the failed convention added, "It was very properly remarked that the greatest difficulty was, perhaps, owing to the conduct of the editors themselves, many of whom have so little appreciation of the true standard of dignity, to say nothing of morals, that nothing emanating from a convention, or any other source, could have any effect."[106]

Other indications of lack of interest appeared from time to time. When in 1853 regional editors were invited to a convention in Milton, Pennsylvania, in part to observe the birthday of their patron saint, printer Benjamin Franklin, only five arrived—a showing, they agreed, "so small as to indicate an absence of any general interest in the subjects for the consideration of which it was called, and thus prevents a proper interchange of opinion or courses of action."[107] The five adopted four resolutions: to salute Franklin, to mourn the death of a fellow editor, to urge that the meeting's minutes be published in local newspapers, and to adjourn. When Dr. Ezekiel Holmes of the *Maine Farmer and Journal of the Useful Arts* was the only editor to show up for an 1834 convention at Augusta, Maine, the *Portland Family Reader* quipped, "We hope brother Holmes will report the proceedings of the Convention, and inform us what rules were adopted for the improvement of the Press, &c."[108] In Ohio in 1833, too few editors arrived to make a convention worthwhile, "owing, it is believed, to the shortness of the notice of the time fixed for it to meet, together with considerable apathy on the part of Editors and Printers generally throughout the State."[109] The few editors attending resolved to try again another time.[110] Likewise, "An editorial convention which was to have assembled at Lynchburg [VA] proved an entire failure" in 1842.[111] Complained the *Farmers' Cabinet* in 1849, "The New-Hampshire Editors Convention so much talked of, has dwindled to an Oyster Supper! We back out from our engagement to be there, and hope nothing more will be said of a Convention."[112]

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[105]"Editorial Correspondence," *Sunbury (PA) American*, October 30, 1858.

[106]Ibid. See also "The Editorial Convention at Columbus," *Newport (RI) Mercury*, August 10, 1833.

[107]"Printers' Convention," *Lewisburg (PA) Chronicle*, January 28, 1853.

[108]*Portland (ME) Family Reader*, "Editorial Convention," exchange-press item in *Liberator*, Boston, March 22, 1834; "An Editorial Failure," *New-Hampshire Patriot*, Concord, NH, April 7, 1834. See also Ezekiel Holmes, "Editorial Convention," *Maine Farmer and Journal of the Useful Arts*, Winthrop, March 14, 1834. Holmes chided the fraternity, saying "had due authority been delegated . . . [he] might easily have borne the whole *responsibility* and *dignity* of every *Down East* editor upon his shoulders without staggering with the weight."

[109]"The Editorial Convention," *Literary Cabinet and Western Olive Branch*, St. Clairsville, OH, July 20, 1833.

[110]Ibid.

[111]"Virginia," *Niles' National Register*, October 15, 1842.

[112]"The New Hampshire Editors' Convention," *Farmers' Cabinet*, Amherst, NH, November 8, 1849.

Disdain for the work of the conventions occasionally sparked amused humor and sarcasm. Noting that "political friends and political adversaries in other States are coming out for an Editorial Convention" in 1833, the *Portland (ME) Advertiser*, musing on who would benefit, decided it would be the editors themselves:

> We want to see each other, and for once in our lives; say "how do you do." We want to see how such a Convention will look—how tall this Editor is and how short that one is. Why it will be equal to the Congress of Sovereigns at Toplitz, a sight well worth looking upon. . . . One will ask, "how does this man look who writes such long, big-sounding sentences." "What solemn looking personage is that?" "Why, he who writes such sprightly paragraphs." "Where is the assuming and dignified Mr. —?" *Ans*. "that little sleepy looking chap in the corner."[113]

At an upcoming 1860 convention in Sandusky, Ohio, the *Dayton Daily Empire* noted, editors would "make their usual tour of the Islands" and, "of course they will have a good time, despite the heavy exercises which are put up on such occasions, and which have had the effect of nearly running the institution into the ground."[114]

Apprised of a call for a New York convention in 1836, the Schenectady *Cabinet* demanded, "What good? Do the fraternity mean to establish a *'trades' union?*" We hope not. Evils enough have already grown out of these institutions."[115]

While seeing merit in New Hampshire editors' attempts in 1840 to set fair prices for their newspapers, the *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* nevertheless said, "We have but little faith, however, that any general system can be agreed upon."[116] In Baltimore, the *Sun* sardonically opined that if, at an 1848 editorial convention in Indianapolis, "a less violent spirit than that which characterises [*sic*] much of the Western press, especially of the party stamp, will be promoted thereby, this convention *will not be wholly useless*."[117]

When Illinois editors proposed a convention in 1859, the *Chicago Press and Tribune* argued that while the reasons for the gathering were not spelled out,

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[113]*Portland (ME) Advertiser*, "Editorial Convention," exchange-press reprint in the *New-Hampshire Sentinel*, Keene, NH, November 28, 1833. Italics and punctuation in original.

[114]"The Convention of Ohio Editors," *Dayton (OH) Daily Empire*, July 9, 1860.

[115]"The Editorial or Printers' Convention," *Cabinet*, Schenectady, NY, February 10, 1836.

[116]"Printers' Convention," *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, Concord, NH, February 10, 1840.

[117]"Editorial Convention," *Sun*, Baltimore, November 29, 1848. Emphasis added.

If they are more weighty than "a good time generally" and a more intimate "acquaintance all around," the Convention will probably fail to accomplish them. We have noticed that agreements, relative to the management of private business made at public meetings, are more usually broken than kept, and that they serve no other purpose than to originate quarrels over the question, Who first transgressed? We hope that our friends of the editorial fraternity will not venture upon any such.[118]

Opposed to Codes

Not all editors saw value in a code of ethics or in reining in the press. When Ohio editors in 1839 included resolutions condemning circulation of newspapers from outside the state, particularly penny papers, the Baltimore *Sun* labeled the convention "a complete farce." According to the anonymous writer,

The ostensible object was to adopt measures to suppress the licentiousness indulged in by the press, but they have stepped beyond that mark and endeavored to act as censors of the press, by prescribing to the people of Ohio what papers they shall read and from whom they shall obtain them. If the editors of Ohio, or any other State, wish to make themselves useful, they must throw off the shackles of faction, and act as free agents—not the tools of party. Then there would be none of the jealousies, the heart burnings, the bitter animosities that have so often produced not only the estrangement of the nearest friends but disgraceful personal violence, even bloodshed. If they cannot publish a paper without pandering to the evil propensities of the vicious, let them seek some other employment.[119]

Some critics rebelled at what they saw as overreaching by small and unrepresentative groups of editors. An advertisement presented as a reprint from a publication called the *New-York Leader* in 1858 called a New Jersey editorial convention "a humbug. . . . got up principally by the second-class papers as a means of trying to put themselves forward."[120]

A Reader Responds

As is often the case in media history, it is difficult to gauge reader reaction to the many published resolutions and claims to higher purpose. In all but one of the convention reports found during this research, the conversation

[118]"Editorial Convention," *Chicago Press and Tribune*, August 12, 1859.
[119]"The Editorial Convention of Ohio," *Sun*, Baltimore, July 23, 1839.
[120]"To Whom It May Concern," *New-York Tribune*, June 14, 1858.

with readers about the editors' concerns appears one-sided. However, in the wake of North Carolina's convention in 1837, the *Charlotte Journal* reported with seeming—though possibly feigned—shock and dismay that "one among our oldest subscribers" planned to stop the *Journal* and all his other North Carolina papers "because the Editors had had the *presumption* to hold a Convention."[121] The subscriber "made as much fuss about it as if the Editorial Fraternity had met to consult upon a plea to steal away the liberties of the people, instead of adopting rules and regulations for the community at large."[122]

Analysis and Conclusion

In terms of their objectives, the results of the conventions were mixed. Although bringing the subject of editorial comity to the fore, other events—in particular hardening mindsets over slavery and states' rights—were conspiring to keep the editorial venom flowing. As historian Guion Griffis Johnson has suggested, the very reason the codes and conventions seemed necessary were the reasons they could not accomplish their stated objectives.[123] The freewheeling politics of the press inevitably promoted disharmony among editors, while the fragile economics of many newspapers made it unlikely, as one editor said, "that we can all mutually agree not to cut each other's throats, by underbidding."[124] Along with general conventions in the various states, editors united by political convictions held their own parlays. A Free State editors' convention at Decatur, Illinois, in 1856 has been termed "a prelude to the birth of the Republican Party."[125] A year later, Republican editors in Indiana adopted resolutions "to prohibit slavery in the Territories."[126] An 1860 "Convention of Secession editors" in Tennessee was proposed "to get up a correct copy of the Breckinridge platform—no two papers in the State now publishing it alike."[127]

On the other hand, the conventions did contribute to the development of the industry on a number of fronts. Perhaps foremost of these, as the editors themselves recognized in their agendas, was that these meetings staged what became the beginning of a national discussion of editorial ethics and the obligation of newspapers to their readers. Some of the earliest ideas about civility and fairness are echoed in the codes followed by journalists

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[121]"The Printer," *Charlotte (NC) Journal*, December 1, 1837.

[122]Ibid. The paper nevertheless endorsed the North Carolina resolves.

[123]Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937).

[124]"Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, June 13, 1857.

[125]"A Prelude to the Birth of the Republican Party," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 46, no. 3 (Autumn 1953): 311.

[126]"Affairs in Indiana," *New-York Herald*, January 8, 1857.

[127]"Convention of Secession Editors," *Athens (TN) Post*, September 7, 1860.

today. As historians David Waldstreicher and Sean Wilentz point out, public performance of decorum and civility were important values among early nineteenth-century artisans, and the editors regularly affirmed those values for readers.[128]

The proceedings also helped shape and affirm the value and role of newspapers in a free society. As historian Alan Taylor notes, "By the 1820s leading Americans hoped for national unity, wished to set aside the bitter political conflicts of the preceding four decades, and longed to consolidate the Revolution into enduring institutions."[129] Such a longing, with newspapers being enshrined as one of those enduring institutions, is evident in the editorial conventions' resolves and other public pronouncements of editors and publishers of the day.

Alone among craftsmen of the time, the printers had the ability to bring their concerns and discussions to the public through frequent editorial mentions of their conventions. In the language of the resolutions and the serious rhetoric with which editors greeted the conventions we see a public performance of the values and demeanor that members of the craft deemed important not only to serving their readers and the nation but also to elevating their own station. Through the exchange press, the agendas and resolves spread to readers around the country. "The Proceedings of the Convention have attracted great attention in this, as well as other States," the *Richmond Enquirer* reported in 1838, "and they have been hailed with the greatest satisfaction."[130] The various reports affirmed to readers that, despite behaviors they saw nearly daily in their newspapers, editors were dedicated to improving their craft and the republic. In their resolves, they regularly affirmed values important to American democracy and aligned their profession with America's aspirations.

Although conventions were held as early as the 1820s, they gained momentum in the mid- to late 1830s, a period when the political parties were spending less on newspapers. The rise in popularity for the conventions, then, parallels a trend from party-centric to the beginnings of a new model for journalism. In the published proceedings, we see the editors increasingly taking their cues more from the profession than from the parties. As many of the champions of media civility—Shadrach Penn of Kentucky and Thomas Ritchie of Virginia, for instance—were important political leaders as well as editors who had been titans of the partisan press,[131] their strong support

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[128]David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1778–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[129]Taylor, *William Cooper's Town*, 419.

[130]"Editorial Convention," *Richmond (VA) Enquirer*, February 1, 1838.

[131]Baldasty, "The Press and Politics in the Age of Jackson."

for temperate discourse and a unified sense of how editors should behave is a significant marker for how American journalism was changing during the later part of the antebellum era.

The efforts to civilize journalism also occurred in the context of reform movements in many other aspects of American society. Starting in the 1820s and continuing through the antebellum period, reformers championed religion, temperance, anti-vice programs, women's rights, and abolition. The editors' concerns for moderation aptly fit the national mood for social improvements.

Ripple Effect

Reports of the conventions that were circulated in the exchange press energized the fellow editors and prompted calls for yet more conventions. Noting a New York convention, editors in Brattleboro asked in 1849, "Why not have such a Convention in Vermont during the coming session of the Legislature?"[132] Pennsylvania editors, at an 1850 convention, adopted a Vermont convention's language on civility.[133] Seeing reports of a New Jersey convention, editors in Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin, began urging one of their own in 1846.[134] Texas editors, noting a Mississippi convention, pressed for their own state convention in 1849.[135] Also in 1849, the *Farmers' Cabinet* at Amherst, New Hampshire, observed, "A convention of editors has been held in N.Y., and another is called in Vt., and a third should be called in N.H. Who'll start it?"[136]

Meeting and then exchanging accounts of their deliberations allowed members to share ideas and promote craft identity,[137] leading to standardizing business practices. Collectively, they could adopt reforms that individually they could not, and the discussions yielded improvements, chiefly adoption of the cash system and advance payment for printing services. "It was stated that the Connecticut Press never stood in so good a position, pecuniarly, [*sic*] as at present, owing to the benefits of the regular system of advance and cash

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[132]"Editorial Convention," *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, Brattleboro, VT, September 17, 1849.

[133]"Editorial Convention," *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, Brattleboro, VT, September 14, 1850.

[134]"Convention of Editors," *Wisconsin Democrat*, Madison, September 26, 1846.

[135]"Editorial Convention," *Rusk (TX) Pioneer*, August 15, 1849.

[136]"Free Paper Postage," *Farmers' Cabinet*, Amherst, NH, October 11, 1848.

[137]See, for instance, "Editorial Convention [Virginia]," *North Carolina Standard*, Raleigh, November 29, 1837; "Editorial Convention [Indiana]," *Barre (MA) Gazette*, January 30, 1846; "Editorial Convention [New York]," *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, Brattleboro, VT, September 17, 1849; "Ohio Editorial Convention," *Hudson River Chronicle*, Sing-Sing, NY, February 5, 1850; "Editorial Convention of South Carolina," *Georgia Telegraph*, Macon, GA, December 21, 1852; "Editorial Convention [Mississippi]," *Arkansas Whig*, February 17, 1853.

payments, as adopted by this association," the Middletown, CT, *Constitution* reported in 1855.[138]

Next Step: Formal Associations

With few powers of enforcement of their codes, editors came to see the need for more frequent conventions—in Georgia, the *Telegraph* suggested that "to be of much benefit, the Convention should be annual"[139] —and soon there were calls for standing organizations. Among resolves of the 1850 Ohio editors' convention was "that a State Typographical Association should be formed,"[140] and, by 1855, "the Second Annual Convention of the Ohio Editorial Association" was called.[141] In 1853, a state editors' association, the Connecticut Newspaper Association, emerged from the Connecticut convention,[142] the same year as the New York state Editorial and Typographical Association was formed.[143] In Massachusetts, the Western Massachusetts Editors' and Publishers' Association, representing five counties, formed in 1854.[144] Wisconsin editors created the Wisconsin Editors' and Publishers' Association at their 1857 convention,[145] and while promoting an editorial convention in 1858, the *Minnesota Republican* declared, "Nothing so much as the organization of an Editorial Association will advance the pecuniary interests of the Press, and promote good feeling among its members throughout the Northwest."[146] One of the first orders of business at a Pennsylvania convention in 1858 was to reconcile that there actually were "two organizations, each claiming to be a State organization—one called the Keystone

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[138]"Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Newspaper Association," *Constitution*, Middletown, CT, June 27, 1855. See also "The Grand Editorial Convention at Mansfield on the 15th and 16th Inst.," *Ohio State Journal*, Columbus, June 21, 1857.

[139]Ibid.

[140]"Ohio Editorial Convention," *Hudson River Chronicle*, Sing-Sing, NY, February 5, 1850.

[141]"Editorial Convention," *Ohio State Journal*, Columbus, January 24, 1855. The editor seemed uncertain about the organization's structure. "What does the term 'association' mean in this connexion [*sic*]? Is it a *permanent* body—an organization with powers and privileges? Or is it an annual gathering for social intercourse, for a good deal of 'fun,' and a little business? We don't seriously object to either, but we would much prefer the former." Italics in original. Later that year, however, the editor approvingly wrote of receiving the published *"History, Organization and Transactions*" of the Ohio Editorial Association, during the years 1853, 1854 and 1855." "Editorial Convention, 1855," *Ohio State Journal*, September 5, 1855. Italics in original.

[142]"Connecticut Editorial Convention," *Barre (MA) Patriot*, June 17, 1853.

[143]"The State Editorial Convention," *New-York Times*, June 11, 1859.

[144]"The Editorial Convention," *Barre (MA) Patriot*, January 20, 1854; "Editorial Convention," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, January 26, 1854.

[145]"Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, July 18, 1857.

[146]*Minnesota Republican*, "Editorial Convention," exchange-press reprint in the *St. Cloud (MN) Visiter* [*sic*], May 27, 1858.

Editorial Union and the other the Editorial Association of Pennsylvania." The solution was a merger of the two as the Pennsylvania Editorial Union.[147] In 1860, New York's Editorial and Typographical Association held its seventh annual meeting, having started as a regional association of western New York editors.[148]

Even as they formed statewide press organizations, the editors began steps that would lead to national associations that would come by century's end. In 1838, the editor of the Wilmington, NC, *Advertiser* was seated at the Virginia state convention.[149] In 1855, the Connecticut Newspaper Association elected delegates to the western Massachusetts association convention.[150] The *Buffalo (NY) Express* sent a representative to the 1855 Ohio convention.[151] Wisconsin editors voted to extend full convention privileges to out-of-state editors attending the 1857 convention,[152] while in 1858 the *Chicago Herald* intimated it would send a representative to Wisconsin's annual editorial convention.[153]

Even before the creation of editorial associations, the conventions gave newspaper proprietors critical mass by which to lobby state and national legislators for improvements in postal regulations[154] and increased legal advertising.[155] Pennsylvania editors in 1849 argued in their resolutions "That as ignorance of the law is no excuse against its violation, the law makers owe it to the law-governed, to allow every citizen to become acquainted with the rules laid down for is observance."[156] Ohio editors voted in 1849 to "require that all legal advertisements shall be published in two newspapers in each

[147]"Godey's Arm-Chair: A Convention of Editors," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, July 1858.

[148]"N.Y. State Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, June 2, 1860.

[149]"Proceedings of the Editorial Convention," *Farmers' Register*, Petersburg, VA, February 1, 1838.

[150]"Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Newspaper Association," *Constitution*, Middletown, CT, June 27, 1855.

[151]"Editorial Convention," *Ohio State Journal*, Columbus, January 24, 1855.

[152]"Editorial Convention," *Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, July 18, 1857.

[153]*Chicago Herald*, "Wisconsin Agricultural Fair," exchange-press reprint in the *Weekly Wisconsin Patriot*, Madison, September 11, 1858.

[154]See, for instance, "Something Should Be Done—Editorial Convention—Postage Reform," *Weekly Ohio State Journal*, Columbus, August 28, 1848; "Editorial Convention," *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, Brattleboro, VT, September 17, 1849; "The Editorial Convention at Syracuse," *Emancipator & Republican*, Boston, September 27, 1849; "To the Honorable, the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress Assembled," *Mountain Sentinel*, Ebensburg, PA, January 24, 1850. See also Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communication* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). Starr points out that in the United States, "In 1832, newspapers made up 95 percent of the weight of postal communication and only 15 percent of the revenue" (90).

[155]"Editorial Convention," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, December 20, 1849; "Editorial Convention," *Mountain Sentinel*, Ebensburg, PA, December 27, 1849.

[156]"Editorial Convention," *Mountain Sentinel*, Ebensburg, PA, December 27, 1849.

county where that number is in existence."[157] It is impossible to measure the specific impact of such resolutions, but federal subsidies to the press, both in reduced postal rates and free exchange-press mailing, remained important to preserving newspapers throughout this period.[158]

Beyond state and regional conventions, as early as 1833 there was talk of convening a national editorial convention, though this would not come about until after the Civil War.[159] If the editors and publishers were unable to meet at the national level at this period, however, another branch of the craft, journeyman printers, did. Journeyman printers had organized to found the National Printers' Union, which met nearly annually around the country in the 1850s to adopt resolutions seeking higher wages and better working conditions.[160] While printers could come together on issues of work rules and income, editors would have a far more difficult time bridging sectional politics as tensions mounted leading to the Civil War.

Echoes over Time

Accounts of these early conventions have a modern ring. Concern over civility in print in the 1830s—"There are too many in the profession who seem to imagine that language may be applied in a paper to individuals, which if spoken would call for the application of a horsewhip"[161]—remains a concern among editors and scholars of the online environment.[162] "We treat our readers no less fairly in private than in public," the *New York Times'* associate managing editor for standards reminded staff in a 2012 memo. "Anyone who deals with readers is expected to honor that principle, knowing

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[157]"Editorial Convention," *Pittsfield (MA) Sun*, December 20, 1849.

[158]See, for instance, Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), especially 87–94.

[159]"Editorial Convention," *Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post*, Philadelphia, August 31, 1833; "Editorial Convention," *Christian Watchman*, Boston, November 27, 1833; "Editorial Convention," *New-Yorker*, New York, March 9, 1839.

[160]George A. Tracy, *History of the Typographical Union, Its Beginnings, Progress and Development, Its Beneficial and Educational Features Together with a Chapter on the Early Organization of Printers* (Indianapolis: International Typographical Union, 1913); "National Convention of Journeyman Printers," *New-York Daily Tribune*, December 6, 1850; "Printer's National Convention," *Gallipolis (OH) Journal*, December 26, 1850; Printers' Convention, *New-York Daily Tribune*, April 8, 1852; "National Printers' Union," *Nashville (TN) Patriot*, May 5, 1859.

[161]"An Editorial Convention," *New-York Traveller, Spirit of the Times and Family Journal*, New York, September 28, 1833.

[162]See, for instance, Ashley A. Anderson and others, "The 'Nasty Effect:' Online Incivility and Risk Perceptions of Emerging Technologies," *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* (2013). Accessed online at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcc4.12009/pdf.

that ultimately the readers are our employers. Civility applies whether an exchange takes place in person, by telephone, by letter or online."[163]

Readers then, as now, could prove mercurial, and the form and content of news—anything but stable in 1830—remain so in the digital age. Moreover, just as publishers today are looking for ways to monetize Web content that previously had been free, editors in these early conventions looked for ways to price all manner of content they had been publishing without charge. A resolve by Connecticut editors in 1853 that "publishers of newspapers in this State owe it to themselves to charge for obituary notices, resolutions, etc., exceeding five lines in length, whether in prose or verse, at not less than their regular advertising rates" drew considerable attention around the country.[164] In 1860 a similar resolution in Maryland called for "a full charge . . . for eulogies and obituaries of deceased persons."[165] In effect, the philosophy behind the Connecticut proprietors and others around the country was summed up in a second resolve, "As the sense of this Convention, that editorial notices to promote private interests, resolutions of societies, &c, should invariably be paid for."[166] They might have added, as many other conventions actually did, "paid for in advance."[167]

Enduring Effects

Even if the conventions failed to achieve their immediate stated objectives in all cases—and recurrent, redundant agendas over the years suggest they did not—we can see accomplishments emerging from the movement. For one, the discourse of these conventions, published in newspapers throughout a region, offered a temperate alternative to the toxic discourse often seen in newspapers, providing an alternative vision of what constituted good practices. While it is beyond the scope of this research to undertake a comparative analysis of the intra-craft toxicity of the discourse before and after the conventions got under way, the tensions that were leading to the Civil War were ample counterweights to amiability. It is worth noting, however, that in the resolutions affirming of the craft's value to American democracy—and the qualities of men of the press—these publishers and editors were aligning their values with those of the general public. Lawyers during this period

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[163]Philip B. Corbett, quoted in Margaret Sullivan, "After an Outburst on Twitter, The Times Reinforces Its Social Media Guidelines," Public Editor's Journal, *New York Times Blog*, October 17, 2012, accessed at http://publiceditor.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/17/after-an-outburst-on-twitter-the-times-reinforces-its-social-media-guidelines/.

[164]See, for instance, "Editors' Convention," *Boston Daily Atlas*, June 14, 1853.

[165]"Maryland Editorial Convention," *Sun*, Baltimore, February 24, 1860.

[166]Ibid.

[167]See, for instance, "Editors' Convention," *Lexington (KY) Intelligencer*, February 28, 1837; "The Kentucky Editors," *Southern Intelligencer*, Austin, TX, January 20, 1858.

were doing the same thing.[168] All in all, the various occupational groups of the age served up laundry lists of virtues they brought to the polity. And in proclaiming their own values, publishers, lawyers, and other civic leaders provided readers guidance in their own conduct.

The conventions also planted the seed, starting practitioners thinking about codes of ethics that might guide—if not govern—the practice of journalism. In doing so, the published convention proceedings helped publicize and affirm the alignment of citizen values and cultural mores with those of journalists. The proceedings, published and republished in the exchange press, were the beginnings of a dialogue among editors and between editors and their publics about what citizens could and should expect of the nation's journalists.

Perhaps most importantly, these early efforts at association and cooperation provided the experience and momentum that led to founding formal editorial associations in many parts of the country in the years preceding the Civil War. Early on, editors in Georgia and elsewhere saw the need for regularly scheduled meetings to discuss the business of journalism, a normalization they saw as best accomplished by formal organizations that were being created by midcentury and that would proliferate after the Civil War.

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[168]Gaines, "The 'True Lawyer,'" 142–150.